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THE STAMP OF APPROVAL FOR SMILING

The Gemara says in *Kesuvos* (111b) אמר רבי יוחנן טוב המלבין שינים, giving a smile to someone, יותר משקהו חלב, is better than giving him a refreshing milk to drink, as it says in the *passuk* in this week's *parsha*, וילבן שינים מהלב, “His teeth [referring to Yehuda] are whiter than milk” (Bereishis 49:12). Says the Gemora, don't read it *l'ven shinayim*, but *libun shinayim* (the whitening of teeth). That means, a person who smiles at his fellow man and shows him a pleasant face, you should know that it is more valuable to the recipient than giving them a *kos chalav*, a nice glass of fresh milk. And a good word of encouragement is worth an amazing amount. Now that's a Gemara in *Kesuvos*.¹

There are very few people who actually *work* on giving smiles to other people. They don't work at it. Either they're interested in smiling or they don't smile, but to actively make somebody feel good and cause him to smile, many people don't work on that. It's unfortunate.

YOUR FACE SHOULD RADIATE SIMCHA

There was a *gevaldige talmid chacham* in Eretz Yisrael, a Rosh Yeshivah. He was a *talmid* of Yeshivas Chevron in Eretz Yisrael. He was a *talmid* of the Alter from Kelm. He opened his own yeshivah at some point in Chevron. His name was Rav Zevulun Aryeh Graz (1904-1989). He was a known *talmid chacham* in Eretz Yisrael. When he came to learn in Yeshivas Chevron, he came in to see the Alter from Slabodka and to greet him. And the Alter gave him a very strange *zog*: He told him, “You appear with the face of a *rasha* - *Du kooks os vi a rasha*.” He was a very *chashuve bachur*. He was a known *chashuve bachur*, an outstanding *bachur*. Now, when the Alter from Slabodka said something, you didn't ask *she'eilos*. Today, if a Rosh Yeshivah would tell a top *talmid* - even if he told a *shvache talmid* - “You look to me like a *rasha*,” the guy would say, “Huh? Okay, I'm out of here,” and march right out! But when the Alter from Slabodka said that, you listened. This *bachur* was very close to him because his father was also very close to the Alter. And he said,

¹ כי אתא רב דימי, אמר: אמרה פנסת ישראל לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבונן של עולם, רמוז לי בעיניך דבסיים מחמרמא, ואחיו לי שיניך דבסיים מחלבה. מסייע ליה לרבי יוחנן. דאמר רבי יוחנן: טוב המלבין שינים להבירו יותר ממשקהו חלב, שצאמר: “וילבן שינים מהלב”, אל תקרי “לבן שינים” אלא “לבן שינים”.

“Can you please explain your *kavanah*?” And the Alter told him, “Coming to me with such a face?! Is that the way you come to me?! With such a face?! Where is the *simchas hapanim*? You came to learn in the great Yeshivas Chevron. You came to learn in a place of *medushnei oneg*.” The Alter from Slabodka used to call his yeshivah a place of *medushnei oneg*. You know what *medushnei oneg* means? “Fattened with delight” with tremendous joy. The Alter asked him, “Is that how a *medushen oneg* looks?” From then on, anybody who met Reb Zevulun always saw him with a great smile. And the *talmidim* would say to him, “The Alter was *mashpia* on you, and the *hashpaah* continues for many, many years to come.” And he said, “Yes, it does.”

Now the question is, why did the Alter say that the *talmid* appeared like a *rasha*? He could have said he appeared “unhappy.” Why did he say that he had the face of a *rasha*? The Alter explained that it is written in a famous *sefer* called *Akeidas Yitzchak*, written by Rav Yitzchak Arama (1420-1494). In Parshas Emor, שער ס”ז, he says, רוע הפנים, a bad-looking face, לא יבוא, will not come to a Yid, כי, or מרוע הנפש, except because of a physical sickness, מחולי הגוף, or because his *nefesh*, his soul, is in a bad place.² You hear that? It means a person who’s not smiling is showing that he has a problem. (Yesterday, I made a mistake; I said it’s referring to a person who has *atzvus*, sadness. No, no. We’re talking about a person who has a *ro’a panim*, even if on the inside he is very happy. It’s not at all *atzvus*.)

Rav Chaim Vital speaks about what’s the source of *atzvus*; but now we’re talking over here about what makes a person who’s happy *b’emes* have a *ro’a panim*, a bad face. It is one of two things: he is either sick or it’s *ro’a nefesh*, he has some spiritual malady. This is not a *davar pashut*.

Rav Isaac Sher, the son-in-law of the Alter of Slabodka, said that even for a person who learns all day long, this *chessed* - giving a smile - is a *chessed* that is always *shayach* to do. To smile at others is a very very great act of kindness, a *chessed gadol beyoser*.

ALL BECAUSE OF A SMILE

Rav Shlomo Wolbe (1914-2005) used to tell a story about a *baal teshuvah* who came from a very secular city in Eretz Yisrael. He was asked, “How did you become *frum*? What made you *frum*?” And he answered, “Where I lived, there was one token *frumme* Yid,

² והמשורר אמר (תהלים קל"ט) וראה אם דרך עוצב בי וגו'. ולזה היה מוסר הפילוסוף אל המלכים שישמרו מהאנשים רעי פנים ועצבים ולא ישרתום רק האנשים השמחים אשר יראו פניהם צהובים ושוקים. וזה הדבר הוא מבורר בכתוב בענין נחמיה התרשטא אמר ויהי בחדש ניסן שנת עשרים לארתחשסתא המלך יין לפניו ואשא את היין ואתנה למלך ולא הייתי רע בעיניו ויאמר לי המלך מדוע פניך רעים ואתה אינך חלה אין זה כי אם רע לב ואירא הרבה מאד (נחמיה ב'). הרי שהמלך היה הדין דין אמת לפי למוד הטבעי כי רוע הפנים לא יבא כי אם מחולי הגוף או מרוע הנפש וכשנתאמת אליו שאינו, וכו'.

a real *frumme* Yid. Among all the other neighbors, everybody minded their own business; they weren't friendly with each other, but this Charedi person was the only one who was different. Every morning I would see him, and he gave me a big smile and he wished me 'Shalom!' And I began to think, what's the *pshat* that this guy out of all the other neighbors is doing this? And I began to talk to him. I realized the only difference between this Yid and all the others was that he was a Charedi. He was a *Torahdige* Yid. Because of that, I became curious to look into the Torah and the *mitzvos* and I became *frum*." You hear that?

Sometimes you're not in the mood. So what? So you're not in the mood. But you still should go out of your way to show a positive face. The Chafetz Chaim added a *chiddush*. The Chafetz Chaim said, generally, if you show somebody a smile, you make them feel happy. The Chafetz Chaim said it's such a *tovah*, when you give somebody a smile, that the person who receives that smile, his teeth become whiter. You hear that? *Pashut*. It's a way of making his teeth white! And in Slabodka they would say over from Rav Yisroel Salanter that a person who walks in the street and doesn't smile, he's a מזיק ברשות הרבים, or אבור ברשות הרבים... he's a public menace. Unbelievable!

The grandchild of the Alter from Slabodka once had to cross the border and it was a little dangerous. The Alter said, "Who's going with you?" The grandson mentioned the name of a certain *bachur*. The Saba, the Alter, said, "With that *bachur*, do not go under any circumstances. Why? Because he always has a *panim zo'afos*. He doesn't have a smiling face. And I'm concerned that he's lacking *zechusim*, he doesn't have the right merits." You hear that? Having self-awareness - to know what you project to other people - is crucial!

AN ENCOURAGEMENT GEMACH

In Eretz Yisrael, there's a *gemach*. There's a lot of *gemachim*, hundreds of *gemachim*, but this one is unique. If you look in some of the magazines and newspapers, there are lists of *gemachim*. One of the *gemachim* they have is *gemach idud*, a *gemach* for encouragement. What's it about?

It says in the Gemara in Bava Basra (9b), that if you give somebody *tzedakah*, it's a great *mitzvah*, you get a lot of *brachos*, you get six *brachos*.³ But if you make somebody feel good, then you're going to get eleven *brachos*. You hear that? How did this *gemach* come about?

³ בבא בתרא ט: ואמר רבי יצחק כל הנותן פרוטה לעני מתברך בשש ברכות והמפייסו בדברים מתברך ב"א ברכות ז' הלא פרוש וגו' ועניים מרודים תביא בית וגו' כ' נח - הנותן פרוטה לעני מתברך בשש ברכות דכתיב (ישעיהו י') ותפק לרעב נפשך ונפש נח תראה ערום וגו' והמפייסו בדברים מתברך באחת עשרה ברכות שנאמר (ישעיהו) נענה תשביע וזרח בחשך אורך ואפלתך כצהרים ונחך ה' תמיד והשביע בצחצחות נפשך וגו' ובנו ממך חרבות עולם מוסדי דור ודור תקומם וגו'

Once upon a time in Bnei Brak on a side street, near the edge of the city, there was a *dirah* with a big sign in the window: “*Dirah L’Mechirah*.” Someone was offering an apartment for sale, directly, via the owner. A lot of people are interested in those kinds of apartments, thinking they’re going to get a deal, and save on some of the real estate expenses. Someone was going past, and he decided, “It’s probably not an expensive *dirah*. I’m going to go in and check it out.” So he called up and he made an appointment with the lady, and he came. And the lady shows him the *dirah*, shows him all the good points of the *dirah*. He says to her, “Now what’s the price? What are you asking for it?” She named an outstandingly high price. A ridiculous price. The guy said, “For that price, I can’t afford it. I’m sorry, and I’ll see you around.” Nu? A year goes by and the guy’s on that street again. And he sees the sign in the window, it’s still there. “*Dirah for sale*”. Now he’s sure that the price went down. So he calls up, goes to the *dirah*, and he figures, “Maybe now I’ll get a *metziah*. It’s been on the market for a year.”

The lady opens the door and she says, “Let me show you the rooms.” He says, “I don’t have to see the rooms. I’ve been here a year ago and I already went through the whole apartment and you gave me a really good show of the apartment. I just want to know, what’s the price?” And she repeated herself, the exact same price. A ridiculous price.

So he says to her, “That was the same price you asked for the *dirah* last year. How come there’s no difference in the price this year?” So she burst out crying and her face turned colors. It came out that she had absolutely no interest in the world in selling the *dirah*. She was just extremely lonely, and she wanted to have people that she could interact with. So she put up the sign, so that people should visit her. You hear that? That was her idea to get visitors. Not a bad idea.

The guy goes out of the house and he bumps into a neighbor. And he says to the neighbor, “Tell me, do you know anything about this lady?” “Yeah, I know she’s been trying to sell her apartment for a while.” He says, “No, she’s not trying to sell the apartment.” “I know she is. There’s a big sign. People keep on coming and asking about the apartment.” He said, “I’m going to tell you something. I was just by that lady. And she’s not lowering her price. It’s been a year, and she’s still asking for the same high price. She doesn’t want to sell it. She has no interest in selling the apartment. But she’s lonely and she wants to have people to visit her.” When that Yid heard that, he was so shaken up, that he said on the spot, “I’m going to start a *gemach*. A *gemach* to encourage people who need encouragement.” And he started his “*gemach idud*” - an “encouragement *gemach*” based on the Gemara in Bava Basra - ברכות בי"א ברכות - you get 11 brachos for encouraging somebody.

You don't understand what this means, rabbosai. This Yid started a *gemach* because of the pain of someone he didn't even know personally! Maybe you live in a big city like New York or Lakewood. There are so many thousands of Yidden who are strangers to you. You pass them on the street, and everybody is busy with his own *gesheft*. Of course, if you meet somebody you know, maybe you say "Hello," and give him a little smile. But, if you meet a stranger, you don't say anything. This person was so moved that he did something that would bring happiness to so many people!

HAVE YOU LOOKED IN THE MIRROR LATELY?

A *talmid* of Rav Isaac Sher (1880-1952), R' Shlomo Hoffman (1922-2013), once came to learn with Rav Sher. When he walked into the room, the Rosh Yeshivah asked him, "Shlomo, why are you so sad?" He said, "I'm not sad." "No, no, you're sad," the Rosh Yeshiva said. "You look sad."

R' Shlomo Hoffman later said "I didn't have an understanding about myself at that time to realize that I had a very serious expression on my face. When I kept on denying that I was sad, Rav Isaac asked me about it:

"When's the last time you looked in the mirror to see your face?" he asked me. "If you would have looked in the mirror, you would have been embarrassed to walk into the street with such an expression on your face. If you knew how you looked, you wouldn't dare to walk into my house with such a look on your face."

Can you imagine that? The *bachur* said; I thought I was clever and I decided to ask Rosh Yeshivah:

"Nu, where does it say in the *Shulchan Aruch* that you're supposed to look at yourself in the mirror to see how you look?"

The Rosh Yeshivah didn't bat an eyelash. He told me "ברענגט מיר א חומש בראשית - Bring me a *Chumash Bereishis*...Not only is it an explicit *halacha* in the *Shulchan Aruch*, it's an explicit *passuk* in the *Chumash*." He turned a few pages until he reached the story of Kayin and Hevel. That's when I got scared. "Do you mean that I have the face of a murderer?" So Rav Isaac said, "No, no, no. Murder was Kayin's second problem. The first failing that he had, that Hashem challenged him on was, למה נפלו פניו? 'Why do you look down?' You see in the *passuk*, Hashem says to Kayin, 'Why are you angry and your face looks downcast?' Now, why did Hashem ask him this question? How was Kayin supposed to know how his face looked? From here we see that a person is supposed to look in the mirror - to know what kind of expression he's wearing on his face, to know if it's a happy face or not a happy face."

Rav Shlomo said, “For a long while after that, Rav Isaac demanded that I make sure to wear a smile whenever I walked into the Rosh Yeshivah’s house. What’s more, he gave me a number of exercises to get me used to smiling. One time he told me, ‘You’re a בור ברשות הרבים. You cause damage to everyone around you with the glum expression on your face.’ He spent a lot of time talking to me about it until he changed me completely. Eventually, I became the extreme opposite. I could smile and laugh about everything, even things that everybody else finds sad.” And he used to say, “You can smile, no matter what experience you’re facing.”

Kayim had just murdered his brother. Shouldn’t he feel sad? Shouldn’t he look sad? Shouldn’t he feel glum? He should feel terrible. Yet, Hashem says, “What are you looking so sad for? Just because you murdered somebody? That’s not the *nekudah*.” In Slabodka, they worked on it. “They worked on it with me,” Rav Shlomo Hoffman said.

DOING CHESSED ON A SMALL SCALE

Rav Shlomo said: There was one time on *erev Rosh Hashanah* that the Rosh Yeshivah wanted me to make a small resolution, a *kabbalah* of *chessed*. I told him, “I have no money. What should I do? How can I do *chessed*?” He said, “You don’t need money. Just do one small resolution.” Rav Isaac told Rav Shlomo that when he came to Slabodka, he was very poor. But he decided he wanted to do a *chessed* with the *olam*. So he paid attention to what the *bachurim* needed. He saw that at night, the *bachurim* were looking for matches, but they had no matches. They were so poor, they had no matches. They would go scrounging around to find a match. Rav Isaac said, “I spent several months saving up whatever small coins that I had until I had enough to buy a box of matches, and that lasted for months. Anyone who needed a light would know to come to me and get it.”

MAKING PEOPLE LAUGH

Rav Sher continued: “There’s another *chessed* that doesn’t cost any money.” One time, during Rosh Hashanah, Rav Isaac did this *chessed*. Rav Isaac knew how to make people laugh. There was a minyan in his home on Rosh Hashanah, and before the *shofar* blowing, Rav Isaac gave a *shmuess* that the *bachurim* were all looking forward to. And it had a humorous twist to it. He was explaining that Rosh Hashanah is not a time for personal requests. On Rosh Hashanah you don’t ask for personal things. And he told a story about a king who was being crowned. All the noblemen and ministers were there. And everybody was making a big to-do about this king. And suddenly, some *schnorrer* walks into the room and the guy has a cup with coins and he starts to shake the coins. “*Tzedakah*,

tzedakah.” And the whole somber moment of the *shmuess* was ruined. The *olam* laughed because they pictured it like it would have happened. The next day, two of the *chashuve bachurim* didn’t come back to the *minyán*. Rav Isaac asked Rav Shlomo, “These *bachurim*, why didn’t they come back to the *minyán*?” He said, “They thought it was not appropriate because you were making jokes. They were looking for a Rosh Hashanah atmosphere.” So the Rosh Yeshivah said, “You think on Rosh Hashanah you shouldn’t be happy that you’re being ממליך Hashem?! When you’re *zocheh* to stand before Hashem - it’s not something to be happy about?! Tell them they were wrong.”

BECOMING A SMILEY PERSON

You have to know that this is something that you have to have an awareness for, you have to have an awareness about, and for which you have to undertake to change your *middos*.

Rav Shlomo Hoffman - who was also a *talmid* of the Alter from Slabodka - said that as he grew up in life and faced some very difficult challenges, he learned to smile through all of them. And he learned never to get down or get into melancholy. The *menuchas hanefesh* that he got from his Rosh Yeshivah, the inner peace, the inner satisfaction of the awareness that you’re with Hashem, and that Hashem is with you, that’s something that he got from his Rosh Yeshiva, and he worked on it. There was never, and there is never a reason to stop smiling. He used to say, “People would ask me, how could you laugh at such a serious thing?” He said, “I used to marvel at myself, because my whole personality, till I was past the age of 20, was the most serious, somber, glum type of person. You couldn’t get me to laugh even at things that were funny. And I changed. I worked on myself.”

And this mindset, *rabbosai*, gives you a *menuchas hanefesh* to deal with things, to grow from things. And this is a big lesson in this *parshah*. We have to know that when people don’t have control over themselves, and people lose themselves, and they become sad and they get glum for any reason, that’s not what Hashem wants from us. It’s not what Hashem expects from us.

Hashem Yisborach wants that in all situations you should remain with a smile in your heart and on your face. And if there’s any sadness going on, it should be completely relegated to the inside.⁴ And it should never show up.

⁴ ובספר חובות הלבבות - שער הפרישות - פרק ד: "אבל תנאי הפרישות המיוחדת כאשר אמר קצת החסידים, הפרוש, צהלתו בפניו ואבלו בלבנו."

IN SUMMARY

It may surprise us to discover that the value of curling our lips upwards into a bright smile is expounded upon in the *Chumash*, the *Gemara*, the *sefarim of gedolei Yisrael* and the *drashos of gedolei haMussar* ^{5, 6}, as well as by contemporary Rabbanim. Smiling is an important *avodah* that all of us can adopt. When we smile, we are spiritually and physically in a good place, and in fact, giving a smile and/or words of encouragement brings multiple *brachos* to ourselves and others. We tend to gravitate towards smiley people - maybe we sense their inherent merits. To become these smiley people, we can perform daily smile-checks, by looking in the mirror to see whether we are smiling enough. Smiling at others is a *chessed*. Doing this *chessed* even in small 'doses' quickly builds up to become a fountain of *menuchas hanefesh* and *bitachon* in Hashem. It can help us to grow and develop better *middos*. This week, as part of my *avodas Hashem*, I will (*bli neder*) keep a mental or written smile diary, actively giving at least three smiles a day, and noting the effects on myself and others.

⁵ ובמשנה אבות העניין מודגש פעמיים: (א טו) "שמאי אומר, עשה תורתך קבע. אמור מעט ועשה הרבה. והוי מקבל ישמעאל אומר, הוי קל לראש ונוח לתשחורת, והוי מקבל את כל האדם את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות. (ג יב) "רבי בשמחה."

⁶ נביא שלש דודמאות: ע"ע בספר ראשית חכמה שער הענוה ו - 'ועוד מתנאי הענוה לקבל את כל אדם בשמחה בסבר פנים יפות ולהקדים בשלום כל אדם, ואם ידבר עם חבירו לא ידבר בפנים זועפות אלא בפנים שוחקות'. ע"ע בספר של"ה שער האתייות 'פריין' ג - "הו מקבלין כל אדם בסבר פנים יפות, בפנים צהובות ופנים שוחקות, איש טוב לקבל כל אדם בסבר פנים יפות... וספר לנו אדמו"ר זצוק"ל.... הנה פעם אחת בערב יום הכפורים. בהיותו הולך לבית המדרש להתפלל תפלת מעריב. והנה לקראתו איש אחד מגדולי היראים. פחד וחרדת הדין היה נראה ונכר על פניו. ודמעו על לחיו. אדמו"ר שאל אותו להגיד לו איזה דבר הנחוץ לו. והאיש הירא מגדל עצבון וחרדתו לא ענה אותו מאומה. אדמו"ר זצוק"ל אמר בזה הלשון. כאשר עברתי מעל פני האיש חשבתי בלבי. מה הנני חייב ואשם כי אתה הנך ירא אלקים. ותפחד ומיום הדין. מה זה נוגע אלי. הלא אתה מתייב להשיב אותי על שאלתי בנחת רוח. כי זהו מדרכי הטבה וגמילות חסדים.

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Rav Gelblat
Chasam Sofer
Novominsk
Rashbi Clifton

Cleveland

Detroit

Los Angeles

Chicago

Dallas

Minneapolis

Cincinnati

Far Rockaway

Monsey

Denver

Houston

North Miami Beach

More Locations Coming Soon!

